

Georgia Emergency Management Agency



Disaster First Steps

In an emergency or disaster, first responders arrive on the scene to aid victims while field coordinators from the Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA) assist local officials. As the disaster unfolds, GEMA staff coordinate a wide variety of resources provided by the primary state agencies and volunteer organizations listed in the Georgia Emergency Operations Plan. GEMA also assists local officials with obtaining resources needed for recovery.

In many cases, local officials determine that they have sufficient resources within their jurisdiction to handle the event. If the level of damages goes beyond local capacity, a number of state and federal programs can provide grants and loans or direct assistance to help the response and recovery process. It does not take a disaster declaration by the president to implement some of these programs. This is the sequence of events:

- Disaster strikes. Local officials, including fire, emergency management, emergency medical services and law enforcement personnel respond immediately to protect life and property while public works personnel work to restore services. Local elected officials may declare a state of emergency.
- Assessing the magnitude of the situation, local officials may request state assistance or decide they have sufficient resources to handle the situation. GEMA personnel will be on the scene to assist local officials with this process. If it is determined the disaster exceeds local capabilities, GEMA will ask the Governor to declare a State of Emergency in order to mobilize needed state resources. It also allows for state resources to assist with debris removal.
- The Georgia Emergency Operations Plan is activated when the Governor declares a State of Emergency. This enables state resources to be available to local governments for response and recovery activities. It also automatically enacts the state's price gouging statute.
- After the disaster, the state will enact the Preliminary Damage Assessment (PDA) process. Joint local, state and federal assessment teams are sent to survey the affected areas after it is safe to enter the area.
- If the Governor determines that the situation is so severe that the response effort exceeds state and local resources, the Governor will request federal assistance.